



5-Year Plan (2008 to 2013)

Whidbey Island Conservation District

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Organization of the Whidbey Island Conservation District

A political subdivision of the State of Washington – authorities, powers and structure contained in RCW 89.08. The Whidbey Island Conservation District (WICD) was organized as a subdivision of state government in June 1967. Only the Whidbey Island portion of Island County was included due to the geographic remoteness of Whidbey from the rest of the county, Camano, Ben Ure, Strawberry, and Smith Islands. Camano Island had previously and successfully petitioned to become part of Snohomish Conservation District in 1961. Whidbey Island encompasses a land area of 172 square miles off the coast of Northwest Washington State at the junction of Puget Sound, the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Georgia Strait. Whidbey Island is the largest island in Puget Sound.

Function of the Whidbey Island Conservation District

- To make available technical, financial and educational resources, whatever their source, and focus or coordinate them so that they meet the needs of the local land manager with conservation of soil, water and related natural resources.

Who Do We Serve & Why

- Landowners, land operators, general public, government entities, and local interest groups to promote a conservation ethic and resolve natural resource issues within the district.

Mission of the Whidbey Island Conservation District

- The Whidbey Island Conservation District serves residents of Whidbey Island in conserving and protecting natural resources through technical and financial assistance as well as educational outreach to provide a healthy environment for present and future generations.

Vision of the Whidbey Island Conservation District

- An environment in balance: protection of Whidbey Island's unique natural resources and surrounding waters, minimizing the impacts of growth to maintain a sustainable community.

Values of the Whidbey Island Conservation District

- On a non-regulatory basis, educate and serve landowners and land managers to manage their lands while protecting the environment.
- Have a positive impact on the community through conservation efforts.
- Assist as a liaison between the private land managers and other government agencies.
- Be a recognized community asset for technical assistance and education for management of renewable natural resources.

Natural Resource Priorities and Goals:

Due to the long, narrow nature of Whidbey Island, virtually every land management practice affects the surrounding waters of Puget Sound. The Puget Sound Partnership was formed to restore and protect Puget Sound through a community effort of citizens, tribes, scientists and governments. WICD and our work on the ground work providing technical education and outreach to Whidbey Island landowners will continue to positively impact Puget Sound.

Human population and land use directly affect natural resource conditions on Whidbey Island. Island County is the second smallest county in Washington State yet it has the second fastest growing population in the state. Residential development encompasses much of the shoreline and is expanding into rural and forested areas. Agriculture has been an important historical land use on Whidbey Island. While there are fewer large farms, over 500 acres in size, there are a high percentage of farms 10-50 acres in size and an even a larger percentage of small farms from 1-10 acres in size. Forested land owners require ongoing conservation plans, education and outreach, and technical assistance. Many smaller landowners on Whidbey Island are new to land resource management.

The increase in population and related development on Whidbey Island and Puget Sound as a whole is driving the need for changes in management of stormwater. Low Impact Development education and outreach as well as technical assistance in the use of LID practices to residents and technicians is a priority of WICD. In 1982, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US-EPA) designated Island County with "Sole Source Aquifer" status. This special status is granted when more than 50% of the county population relies on an aquifer system as their principal source for drinking water, and when contamination of the source would create a significant hazard to public health. Increased onsite stormwater infiltration will enhance aquifer recharge while protecting the waters of Puget Sound.

Nitrates are a recognized contaminant of concern in Island County. A 1997 study conducted by the Island County Health Department (ICHD) identified nitrate sources and their extent. This study found agricultural practices to be the largest contributors of elevated nitrate concentrations. Best Management Practices (BMPs) for agricultural nutrients are necessary to protect the sole source aquifers as well as surface water in Island County from contamination, particularly in areas where surface water percolates too rapidly for adequate filtering.

Natural Resource Priorities and Goals to achieve by 2012:

1) Protection of the economic viability of farming and forestry while using best management practices.

Improve and protect water quality and critical areas

Farms

- Provide technical assistance and/or farm plans to at least 20 commercial and noncommercial farm owners and managers annually using NRCS Best Management Practices to protect and enhance water quality while maintaining productive farms. Prioritize landowners served using Island County data CARA mapping for critical aquifer recharge zones.
- Assist at least 30 livestock owners annually with education as well as one on one technical advice on issues such as groundwater and surface water protection, and soil conservation issues.
- Assist Island County in providing education and outreach to comply with the Growth Management Critical Areas Ordinance.
- Assist Island County in providing custom farm management plans and technical assistance for farmers as required by the GMA Critical Areas Ordinance for existing and ongoing agriculture when the ordinance is implemented.
- Provide public outreach and education to youth and the general public on the value of farms and farming for resource protection. Conduct annual farm tour with up to 20 farms open to the public on one weekend every fall. Coordinate, publicize, and provide public education for event.
- Work in collaboration with local and regional partners to increase the viability of agriculture on Whidbey Island as a tool to preserve open space.
- Promote and support Farmland Preservation efforts.
- Partner with local entities to advance the use of reclaimed waste and stormwater for irrigation and other beneficial uses. Throughout the feasibility study process, WICD will hold two meetings annually to educate farmers and two meetings annually to educate consumers about the use of reclaimed water.

- One to two model farms implementing conservation best management practices will be recognized annually.

Forestry

- Provide technical assistance to 3 - 5 forest owners annually including at least three with a full forest management conservation plan.
- Collaborate with DNR, Regional Conservation Districts, Washington State University and Island County to increase technical assistance to Whidbey forest landowners to encourage maintaining healthy and productive forest lands.
- Educate forest landowners about forest management and its affect on near shore habitat and critical areas.
- By 2010, WICD's goal is to have resources for a .5FTE forester assisting forest landowners.

Soil erosion prevention

- Provide assistance to landowners to identify soil types.
- Work with NRCS for access to landowners to update soil survey.
- Provide education and outreach for proper soil erosion protection, sediment control and loss of agricultural soils.

2) Reduce the impact of developed lands on Whidbey Island's natural resources as well as on the waters of Puget Sound that surround Whidbey Island.

Stormwater management

- Assist towns, cities and county with public education, promotion, coordination and advancement of low impact development programs.
- Assist technicians such as dirt movers, landscapers, engineers, maintenance providers and contractors with education and resources for Low Impact Development. Hold at least three workshops annually.
- Assist at least ten individual landowners annually with implementation of stormwater management techniques to address existing stormwater concerns.
- Assist at least five landowners and developers annually with implementation of LID techniques for new development.

Water conservation

- Assist home owners with resources for water conservation practices such as collection and reuse of onsite water with cisterns and rain barrels.
- Present home water conservation information to home owners at a minimum of one workshop per year.
- Promote annual district native plant sale to encourage water conservation in landscapes.

Habitat conservation and protection

- Assist ten homeowners with backyard habitat conservation including bluff management.
- Provide homeowners with land stewardship materials and education for habit conservation. Align with Island County Rural Stewardship plan.
- Educate and provide homeowners with information about the importance of near shore habitat and how human actions affect the near shore.

Improve and protect water quality

- Educate homeowners on how their individual actions on their home sites affect ground water and stormwater.
- Educate and provide technical assistance to homeowners and developers for onsite water infiltration techniques.
- Collaborate with Island County Health and cities on water quality outreach and education.
- Provide both existing materials from Toxics Coalition and other sources. Develop a "low impact living" guide for Whidbey residents that can be adapted to individual areas.

- Work with IslandCounty on identification and action plans to address water quality concerns in residential areas due to septic, stormwater and other issues.
- Collaborate on at least one water quality improvement grant opportunity annually with partners.
- Use Island County CARA mapping for identification of priority work areas.
- Provide water quality and water quantity outreach and education to youth.

3) Protecting near-shore waters, surface waters and habitat.

Habitat restoration and protection

- Work in collaboration with partners on at least one project per year to improve and restore fish habitat.
- Include habitat protection in low impact development, farm and forest education.
- Provide technical outreach and education to land and homeowners on bluff stabilization and erosion control.

Critical Geographic Areas:

- Stormwater runoff that impacts near shore habitat
- Highly susceptible critical aquifer recharge zones
- Maxwelton, Glendale, Cultus, Crescent, and Lone Lake watersheds
- Agricultural lands/pasture lands
- Woodland / forest management

Information – Education Priorities and Goals:

- The WCD website will be an attractive and efficient central point of information for all WICD programs (by December 31, 2008).
- Information will appear on a routine basis in Whidbey Island news publications highlighting WICD work and landowner opportunities (present and ongoing).
- WICD will gain the capacity to prepare updated information, both printed materials and displays (including visual group presentation materials) to provide professional educational resources to the public as well as to illustrate the work of WICD (by July 2009).
- WICD will hold an annual open house to recognize conservation partners and to present landowner conservation awards.

District Operations Priorities, Goals:

- Investigate and secure suitable long-term office space (by June 30, 2008).
- Attract and maintain adequate staffing resources to implement the long range plan (by July 31, 2009).
- Secure a sustainable and reliable local funding source (by December 31, 2009).
- Maintain the ongoing excellence of the financial management of the district (present and ongoing).

Staffing Needs

- District Manager
- Outreach and Education Coordinator/ part-time (NEW)
- 1-2 Farms/Forest Planners (NEW)
- 1-2 Natural Resource Planners for Stormwater, LID and habitat conservation work
- 1 part time engineering assistant for LID
- 1 administrative assistant (including accounting)

- Professional Engineer (NW Cluster)
- Stewardship Forester (part time- shared with Skagit CD)

Trends Impacting Conservation in the Whidbey Island Conservation District geographic area

- Increasing population and the accompanying pressure of increased development.
- Increased water quality / quantity / surface water management concerns.
- Lack common ground between interest groups on Whidbey Island.
- Disappearance of larger family farms and the accompanying infrastructure for them.

Strategies to Address Trends

- Collaborative Grant Development and Funding
- Public Outreach and Education
- Landowner Technical Assistance
- Partnership/Program Coordination and Facilitation
- Monitoring and Adaptive Management

Key Decision Makers/Partners

- Board of Island County Commissioners
- Island County Public Works Department
- Island County Planning Department
- Island County Health Department
- Island County Weed Board
- Puget Sound Partnership
- Washington State Legislators
- Washington State Conservation Commission
- Washington Association of Conservation Districts
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Island, Skagit , San Juan Farm Service Agency
- Congressional Delegation
- State and Federal Agencies including Department of Ecology, Environmental Protection Agency and others.
- Marine Resources Committee
- Whidbey Camano Land Trust
- Water Resources Advisory Committee, WIRA 6
- City of Oak Harbor
- City of Langley
- Town of Coupeville
- Salmon Technical Advisory Group
- Northwest Agricultural Business Center
- Whidbey Sustainable Agriculture Advisory Group
- WSU Extension
- News media including Whidbey News Times, South Whidbey Record, Whidbey Examiner, The Marketplace, and Capital Press

